

White Men Do It Too: Racialized (Homo)sexualities in Postcolonial Hausaland

This article explores how, in talk about sex, Nigerian Hausa men who self-identify as homosexual or womanlike and a Euro-American gay male ethnographer reified racially distinct sexualities against a backdrop of perceived sexual similarity. These discursive transformations indexed and (re)constructed prototypes of ethnic, racial and national identities, and articulated speakers' claims to, or denials of, those identities. Such claims are connected to the global workings of wealth and power, and the discourses of desire and difference that inform and sustain them.

To speak of “Whiteness” is, and ought to be, to speak of the ongoing effects of Euro-Western conquest and oppression of peoples deemed “not White”; this includes the discursive and material processes whereby such racial categories have been and continue to be (re)produced (see Trechter, this issue). Sex, in the sense of interpersonal erotic or genital contact, as well as discourses about gender and sexuality, has played no small part in that history. Fanon (1967) and Bhabha (1994), for example, have characterized European imperialism as the politico-military articulation of White men’s psycho-sexual anxieties, while Stoler (1995) and Bleyes (1996) have documented how colonial regimes created racialized gender and sexual categories and regulated people’s sexual activities in order to solidify their political hegemony. Anthropological accounts of what Malinowski (1929), echoing popular discourses of his time, termed “the sexual life of savages” contributed significantly to these projects, even while he and certain other anthropologists, including Mead (1923), saw their

work as opposing or at least mitigating the most rapacious consequences of colonial rule.

In recent decades the voyeuristic tradition of Western ethnological writing has taken a queer turn as gay male—and, to a lesser extent, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual—anthropologists have sought to document and analyze same-sex erotic practices in societies around the world (e.g., Herdt 1984; Murray and Roscoe 1998). The descriptions of sexual practices reported in most of these studies have been based, at least ostensibly, on verbal interactions between researchers and informants, rather than on other, more sensorily engaged modes of participant-observation. Although the reasons for this methodological anomaly have traditionally remained unstated, some anthropologists have begun to question and even to defy the taboos that have inhibited reflexive, for-the-record discussions of anthropologists' sexual subjectivities in fieldwork settings (see especially the articles in Lewin and Leap 1996 and Kulick and Willson 1995). While some of these works have focused on physical erotic interactions, in this article I seek to apply the ethical and analytical insights generated by these discussions to the ethnographic talk-in-interaction that remains the primary source of anthropological knowledge about sexuality. My particular focus is on how sexual subjectivities are constructed by the ways people (including anthropologists) talk about sex, with an emphasis on particular aspects of both the content and structural properties of that talk. Inspired by the work of queer writers and artists of color such as Lorde (1982), Riggs (1989), and Reid-Pharr (1996), I pay special attention to the ways sexual subjectivities are inherently racialized.

"Other" Genders and Sexualities in Northern Nigeria

My approach to the construction of racialized sexualities highlights the discursive nature of this process, where *discourse* is understood as communicative acts that occur within, and partially constitute, specific social, cultural, historical, and geographical contexts. In the terms provided by Ochs (1992), it is in the course of performing, interpreting, and responding to such acts that social identities are constructed and indexed. The discourse analyzed in this article took place during my fieldwork with 'yan daudu (singular 'dan daudu¹) men in the predominantly Muslim, Hausa-speaking region of northern Nigeria who are said to talk and act "like women." I conducted the major part of this research over the course of 16 months in 1993–94, and followed up on it during subsequent visits to Nigeria in the summers of 1997 and 2000. Most of the 'yan daudu I got to know lived and worked in Kano, the largest city in Hausaland and the third largest in Nigeria, though I also spent time with 'yan daudu in other cities and towns in the northern region.

'Yan daudu's "feminine" social identities are performatively articulated through a number of bodily practices, including the work they do cooking and selling food, and their frequent but variable use of *maganar mata* 'women's talk' (see Gaudio 1997). In addition to these overt social and economic practices, some 'yan daudu, especially older ones, earn money as

intermediaries who introduce male patrons to women known as *karuwai* 'prostitutes/courtesans' or, as the women themselves generally prefer, *mata masu zaman kansu* 'independent women'. Even more covertly, some 'yan daudu, especially younger ones, work as courtesans themselves, providing social and sexual companionship to (ostensibly masculine) men in exchange for money, political protection, and other gifts. In addition to helping them meet their basic life needs, these benefits help 'yan daudu and independent women cope with the abuse and persecution they face on a regular basis.

'Yan daudu and their "masculine" counterparts constitute an informal, secretive, translocal community of *maza masu neman maza* 'men who seek men' that extends to virtually all cities and towns in northern Nigeria, and beyond. During my fieldwork I therefore met scores of men, most of them poor and ethnic Hausa or Hausa-speaking, who covertly self-identified as homosexual, sometimes using the English-derived term *homo*, though the most popular in-group term was *mai harka* (pl. *masu harka*) 'one who does the deed'. With a handful of these men, some of whom were 'yan daudu, I developed close friendships and enjoyed spending long hours chatting about a wide range of matters, including sex. Sometimes this sex talk consisted of gossip about who in our circle of acquaintances was doing what with whom; we also talked about the social and erotic tensions and encounters that characterized our own relationships with men. At other times our conversations drifted to more abstract levels, as we compared what we perceived to be cultural differences in each other's and other people's sexual practices.

This article focuses on select exchanges of the last type, in which talk about sex entailed the reification of ethno-racially distinct sexual identities, even as it relied on and reinforced a shared understanding of same-sex sexuality as a practice we all had in common. In particular, I explore how my interlocutors and I sometimes transformed our comments about people's personal proclivities ("he likes to do X" or "I do Y") into sweeping ethnographic claims about entire groups—especially Hausas, Whites, and Arabs—using plural rather than singular subject pronouns ("we do Z"). My analysis of these discursive transformations highlights two themes. The first theme is that, in a world transformed by Euro-Western colonialism, talk about sex is talk about race. Both kinds of talk are inevitably about power; that is, they reflect and reproduce material and symbolic power relations (see also McElhinny, this issue).

The second theme is that talk about the sexualities of racial others is also always talk about the racialized sexuality of the speaking self. My specific goal in this regard is to problematize the White, middle-class, often male, sometimes queer perspectives from which both "our" and "other" (homo)sexualities are often observed and described, though in the anthropological literature the former are typically unmarked and hence less well elaborated. In the ethnographic situation I write about, this entails paying as much critical attention to what I myself said, and to the social subjectivities indexed by my own utterances, as to the statements made by my interlocutors.

On its surface my statement about the unmarkedness of White sexuality seems to contradict the argument made by JanMohammed (1992) in his discussion of "racialized sexuality" in the United States during and after slavery. In particular, JanMohammed sees "white bourgeois sexuality" as having been "subjected to dense discursive articulation" (1992:103), whereas "racialized sexuality" has been effectively silenced by "white society" (1992: 99, n. 6). The contradiction is only apparent, however, for the "dense discursive articulation" JanMohammed refers to, citing Foucault (1978), does not consist of talk about White sexuality per se. Rather, it consists of the normative institutional practices that have constructed modern bourgeois sexuality in northwestern Europe and its diaspora, the racial specificities of which have been mostly implicit rather than explicit. Indeed, by distinguishing "racialized" from "white bourgeois" sexuality, JanMohammed underscores the extent to which Whiteness remains discursively unmarked as a racialized—and racializing—sexual topos.

Whiteness and Other Sexual Categories

In a critical discussion of race relations within U.S. gay male communities, Reid-Pharr (1996) admonishes White gay writers to attend to the racialized nature of their ideas and beliefs about sex, as well as their sexual desires. "Whiteness," Reid-Pharr writes, "seems incapable of recognizing itself until it is put under extreme pressure, that is to say, until it is confronted with the hypervisibility of Blackness" (1996:41). Although the phenomenon of cultural and racial self-recognition is something all anthropologists can relate to, critical linguistic-anthropological considerations of Whiteness (e.g., Hill 1998) are still relatively few. The conversational exchanges represented below were some of the many situations that arose during my fieldwork in which not just Whiteness, but ideas about "White" sexuality, were rendered "hyperaudible." In our talk about sex, my Nigerian friends and I—a Euro-American gay male anthropologist—constructed Whiteness, Hausanness, and other categories in a variety of ways. These constructions frequently reproduced hierarchies not only of ethnicity, nation and race, but of gender, age and wealth as well. They also reveal the extent to which contemporary identities, practices and discourses continue to be informed by broadscale sociohistorical processes from British colonialism and the spread of Islam to the "globalization" of Euro-American capitalism.

It is important to note that, because most Hausa homos are extremely afraid of being exposed, I was rarely able to tape-record socially occurring speech among them. Tape-recording was as difficult with 'yan daudu, who are regularly harassed and persecuted for their supposed immorality, as with the ostensibly masculine masu harka, whose conformity to hegemonic gender norms allows them to pass unnoticed in mainstream Hausa society. As a result, none of the conversational exchanges presented in this article was tape-recorded; rather, they are drawn from my fieldnotes. Instead of the transcription format used by most contemporary linguistic anthropologists, therefore, I have chosen to represent each exchange in the form of a short prose narrative.

This method of gathering and presenting conversational data is adapted from that used by Basso (1979), Leap (1996), and other researchers in the ethnography of speaking (e.g., Bauman and Sherzer 1974; Burton, Dyson and Ardener 1994). Irvine (1974), for example, who found it "difficult ever to record greetings on tape" (1974:168), analyzes hypothetical Wolof greetings that are based on her own experience as a language learner and user, and on the metalinguistic comments made by her informants in interviews. Other authors in that now-classic volume also analyze linguistic examples drawn from metalinguistic discussions (e.g., Keenan's [1974] analysis of *re-saka* or "everyday speaking" in Malagasy) or discuss the social meanings and uses of language in general terms without providing transcribed examples (e.g., Philips 1974). The continuing importance of this research tradition underscores the fact that, in addition to the tape-recording and transcribing technologies that are readily available to most Western-based linguistic anthropologists, ethnographers' observations as recorded in field-notes and other texts (diaries, letters, e-mails, faxes, etc.) continue to be a necessary part of anthropological analysis of language use. Indeed, when logistical or sociocultural circumstances make tape-recording difficult, they may be the only data sources we have. Such data are clearly inadequate for analyzing certain aspects of linguistic structure, such as phonology and oral-interactive strategies. However, they can provide important insights into the social use and significance of lexical, grammatical and rhetorical forms that are more pragmatically salient and therefore amenable to human memory and reflexive commentary (Errington 1988).

The first exchange occurred in 1993 when I went with a friend to a bar in an area of Kano where most of the city's moderately priced bars, night-clubs and *gidajen mata* '[independent] women's houses' were concentrated. My companion, whom I call Mai Kwabo,² was married to a woman and self-identified as both *homo* and *mai harka*. (Most *masu harka*, including 'yan daudu, get married and have children at some point in their lives.) We were both about thirty years old. Mai Kwabo claimed to have had sexual relationships with a number of 'yan daudu in the area, and with me buying the drinks he was usually more than happy to escort me to the various locales where his friends hung out. It is important to note that these locales were not explicitly homo-identified; there are no such establishments anywhere in Nigeria. Without prior knowledge, it was virtually impossible to tell which of the ostensibly masculine male clients were interested in meeting "independent women" and which sought the company of 'yan daudu or other men. In order to avoid detection and the concomitant risks of social ostracism and persecution, many *masu harka* used a secret in-group lexicon to identify each other and to communicate about their homo-affairs.

A short while after Mai Kwabo and I sat down and ordered our beers, we were joined by Alhaji Hamza, a well-dressed man about our age whom I had never met, though he and Mai Kwabo clearly knew each other.³ After the requisite series of greetings, Mai Kwabo asked his friend a question—"Yaya hajoji?" 'How are the merchandises?' To an uninitiated listener this would appear to refer to a commercial business, but to me it revealed a number of things about Alhaji Hamza's putative sexual subjectivity. *Haja*

'merchandise' is a term from the homo argot, a grammatically feminine noun that refers to the lower-status (younger, poorer, feminized) partner in a typical homosexual relationship. In addition to indicating Alhaji Hamza's homosexuality, therefore, Mai Kwabo's question indexed his friend's status as older, wealthier, and "masculine" vis-à-vis the unnamed "merchandises," young men whose sexual companionship he presumably enjoyed periodically.

Instead of answering with an appropriate rejoinder, Alhaji Hamza was momentarily speechless. His eyes grew wide as he glanced nervously in my direction, signaling his uneasiness about discussing such secret matters in my presence. Sensing his friend's discomfort, Mai Kwabo sought to reassure him. "Ba komai, yana yi," he said. 'Don't worry, he does [it]', by which Mai Kwabo meant that I, too, engaged in sex with other men.

Alhaji Hamza responded to this information with apparent amazement and disbelief. "Eye? Gaskiya ne?" he asked, looking at me. 'Huh? Is it true?' "Gaskiya ne," I replied. 'It's true'.

My straightforward affirmation seemed only to heighten Alhaji Hamza's incredulity. "Turawa ma suna yi?!" he exclaimed. 'White men do [it] too?!'⁴

Alhaji Hamza's exclamation is an instructive inversion of a number of racist and homophobic discursive traditions. It issues numerous challenges: first, to conventional Western ethnology, insofar as it reverses the direction of the ethnographic gaze; second, to certain contemporary queer articulations of that tradition, many of which seem implicitly to ask, "Do non-Whites do it, too?"; and, third, to the homophobic nationalisms of radical Islamists and certain African leaders such as Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe, who have used virulent and even murderous rhetoric in condemning homosexuality as un-Islamic and/or un-African.

Alhaji Hamza's surprised reaction to my admission of homosexuality is not free of colonial ideology, however, for it seems to be based on an image of White men as so morally normative as to be incapable of association with sexual behaviors that are considered deviant. Although many Hausa homos take umbrage at the homophobic polemics of religious and political leaders, many nevertheless believe that homosexuality is decadent and sinful. At the very least it is considered a frivolous amusement that has none of the moral or cultural *gravitas* of heterosexual marriage and biological parenthood. The fact that I actually acknowledged my own involvement in such undignified behavior thus contradicts the patriarchal vision of White men that persists in certain sectors of postcolonial Hausa society. This vision was not unique to Alhaji Hamza; the disclosure of my homosexuality in homosocial settings frequently elicited comments like his. Yet such comments almost always met with patronizing rebukes from other homos—"Come on, fool, of course they do it; everyone does it"—in which those who claimed to know what White men "do" positioned themselves as socially superior by virtue of their greater knowledge about the world.

By using my self-description as an example of what "White men" do, Alhaji Hamza's final question is a prime example of ethno-racial generalization (see also Chun, this issue). While this phenomenon has been widely critiqued within anthropology, in my fieldwork interactions it was ubiquitous.

In part this was due to the nature of the ethnographic encounter. Not only did I ask frequent questions pertaining to Hausa and other Nigerian languages and cultures, but my status as a student, researcher, and foreigner often encouraged my interlocutors to offer explicit metalinguistic and metacultural lessons, whether I elicited them or not. Yet I can hardly take credit for stimulating such cross-cultural commentary, for in a country as large and diverse as Nigeria the making of ethno-racial generalizations is a daily feature of conversation. In addition to the hundreds of ethnolinguistic groups that comprise Nigeria's national population and a small number of White expatriates, another group about whom generalizations can frequently be heard is Arabs, with whom Hausa Muslims have had centuries of cultural, economic, political, and linguistic contact.

The Sexual Life of "Arabs"

As speakers of the language of the Qur'an, Arabs have a collective position of honor in Hausa Muslim society, where knowledge of Arabic and familiarity with Arab culture are indices of religious knowledge, moral respectability, and social sophistication. With the advent of air travel and Nigerian government subsidies for the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, access to these symbolic resources is now more widely available. Thousands of Nigerians travel to Saudi Arabia every year for religious purposes as well as for the opportunity to earn money, often extralegally, through petty trade or the performance of menial labor. These travelers, who inevitably include some 'yan daudu, return to Nigeria with an awareness not only of the material and spiritual splendor of Saudi society, but also of the quirks and shortcomings of individual Arabs and people of other nationalities who participate in this highly multicultural event. References to these shortcomings sometimes form part of the public performance of a returning pilgrim's cosmopolitanism.

The second exchange I analyze consists of excerpts from a conversation I had in 1997 with Alhaji Zinari, a married 'dan daudu in his thirties who had one daughter and had been to Saudi Arabia several times. As we usually did when I stopped by the roadside food-shop where he spent his daytime hours, on this afternoon Alhaji Zinari and I were sitting on a bench just outside the shop's front door, where we could lean against a wall in the shade of a corrugated tin overhang. Gazing out at the hustle and bustle of the street, Alhaji Zinari regaled me with stories about "Saudiyya" that painted a picture of Saudi social life far different from the image I had constructed reading the *New York Times*.

I was especially intrigued by his descriptions of the sexual excesses of Arab men, whom he characterized as *jarababbu* 'horny, oversexed'. In response to my curiosity, Alhaji Zinari seemed to take relish in providing examples of Arab men's *jaraba* 'lasciviousness'. One of these seemed designed to demonstrate not only his cultural knowledge about Arab men's sexuality, but also his own alluring qualities as a 'dan daudu. "In sun ga 'dan daudu a titi, gindinsu zai tashi, za su bi ka har gidanka," he told me. 'If they see a 'dan daudu in the street, they'll get an erection and follow

you all the way home'. He then underscored his powers of ethnographic observation by adding, "Musamman Masarawa." 'Especially Egyptians'.

Alhaji Zinari went on to describe other "Arab" sexual practices that he claimed to find strange or even repulsive. Implicit in these examples was a comparison of Arab men's (homo)sexual predilections with that of Hausas. Regarding oral sex, for instance, Alhaji Zinari said, "Wasu, sai sun sa gindinsu a bakinka. Amma ni, ba na yi. Kar a shigo da k'azanta a bakina." 'Some of them insist on putting their penis in your mouth. But me, I don't do [that]. Don't let any filth get into my mouth'.

Struck by Alhaji Zinari's rejection of a practice that I considered mundane, I replied, "Ni, ina yi." 'Me, I do [that]'.

"Da ma, aikinku ne!" Alhaji Zinari exclaimed. 'Of course, it's your [-pl.] work!', which I understood to mean, "You [White homos/White folks] have been doing it all along; it's your thing!"⁵

Another practice Alhaji Zinari found unusual was Arab men's recent adoption of condom use. "A yanzu kuma, wasu ba sa harka sai sun sa wata roba a gindinsu." 'And nowadays, some of them won't do the deed unless they put a piece of rubber on their penis'.

"A haka," he added, 'Like this', and he hoisted his bare foot onto the bench and unrolled an imaginary condom onto his big toe.

"E, saboda cuta, ko?" I said, nodding with recognition. 'Yeah, because of disease, right?'

"E, saboda cuta," he replied. 'Yeah, because of disease'.

I then sought to inform Alhaji Zinari that condom use—and by implication, an awareness of how HIV/AIDS could be sexually transmitted—was not limited to Arabs. "Mu ma, muna amfani da wannan," I told him. 'Us too, we use that'.

As it turned out, I needn't have doubted Alhaji Zinari's cultural awareness. "E, a wajenku suka koya. Ku ne kuke koyar musu!" he replied. 'Yeah, they learned [it] from you [-pl.]. You're the ones who teach them!'

While Alhaji Zinari had a particular gift for storytelling, the details of his accounts were hardly unique, for the subject of Arab men's sexual peccadilloes was a popular topic of conversation not only among the Hausa homos I knew, but among many heterosexuals too. The ways in which these stories subverted the normative image of Arab Muslim piety and respectability recall Western Apaches' joking portrayals of "the Whiteman" as described by Basso (1979).

In addition to portraying the sexual life of "Arabs," my exchange with Alhaji Zinari also yielded two generalizations about White men's (homo)sexual practices on the basis of the self-reported behavior of a single White man—me. First, Alhaji Zinari transformed my first-person singular statement about oral sex ("I do [that]") into a report about Whites generally, using the second-person plural possessive suffix *-ku* (see also endnote 5). After that, it was I who chose to speak for White/Western people as a class. Whether I intended to represent Western homos specifically or all sexually active Westerners, I still cannot say. In any event, the ambiguity of my intention clearly did not stop Alhaji Zinari from appropriating my generalization in order to elaborate on his descriptions of Arab men. In so doing,

he revealed a confident and specific knowledge about both White/European and Arab homosexual behavior that contrasts sharply with the seeming naivete displayed by Alhaji Hamza in his interaction with me and Mai Kwabo.

Apparently accepting my ability to represent White (homo) society as a whole, Alhaji Zinari constructed an implicit narrative of sociocultural change. Whites were figured as the originators and primary practitioners of "filthy" and technologized sex (oral sex and condom use, respectively), while Arabs were positioned as having acquired these practices later, purportedly through contact with Whites. This conforms with a general sense shared by many Hausa people that Arabs are closer to Europeans than Africans are, not only geographically, but racially, culturally and technologically as well. While this racial cosmology undoubtedly reproduces Eurocentric modes of thinking, it can also be used—as in Alhaji Zinari's statements—to criticize Arabs and especially Whites as morally inferior to Hausas.

Who are "We" Anyway?

The next couple of exchanges, drawn from conversations I had in 1997 with a friend I call Aliyu Raufu, illustrate the complicated relationship between individual sexual preferences, on one hand, and, on the other, sexual practices that are associated with collectivities of ethnicity, nation and race. Aliyu was an unmarried, ostensibly masculine, self-employed businessman in his thirties who covertly self-identified as "feminine" and who tended to have sexual relationships with younger men. Because these men were typically unemployed or underemployed, they were thus in a somewhat analogous social position vis-à-vis Aliyu as the *hajoji* 'merchandises' were in relation to Alhaji Hamza. Instead of using the term *haja* to refer to them, however, Aliyu used the word *saurayi* 'young man, boyfriend' (pl. *samari*), which indexed his companions' ostensibly masculine gender identity. Their economically subordinate status is made clear by both Aliyu's and my use of the expression *aron saurayi* 'lending of boyfriends', which refers to a practice whereby older, "feminine" homos allow certain friends to make sexual overtures towards their own younger boyfriends/merchandises. It is normally expected that the boyfriend who is so approached will assent to the liaison and will also receive money or some other material gift in return.

As a good (platonic) friend of mine and mindful of my status as a guest in his city, Aliyu offered to lend me one of his younger boyfriends on several occasions. One evening he made such an offer while I was accompanying him on his walk home from work. Instead of thanking him, however, my reply was somewhat curt.

"Ni ban saba da wannan aron saurayi ba. Ba ma yi," I said, my voiced tinged with disapproval. 'I'm not used to this lending of boyfriends. We don't do [it]'

My immediate shift from the first-person singular ("I'm not used to this") to the first-person plural ("we don't do [it]") conflated an individual, psychological argument with a moral-cultural one. What I intended to convey

with this and other comments was that my reluctance to participate in the practice of lending boyfriends was informed by my having been socialized in a sexual culture that values egalitarianism and individual choice and that equates these values with "genuine" sexual desire. Of course, since these norms are by no means universally observed within middle-class North American society (homo or otherwise), my self-identification with them effectively constituted the endorsement of a particular practice as "ours" and the concomitant rejection of "others." This rejection was belied, however, by the inevitable inequalities of race, nation, wealth, and age that structured virtually all my interactions with Nigerian homos, including erotic ones, not to mention the persistent asymmetries that characterize sexual relations in the United States.

This was not the first time Aliyu had heard me voice confusion or frustration over social practices I considered unusual. While he was always a sympathetic listener, on this occasion he responded to my implicit characterization of the lending of boyfriends as a monolithically "Hausa" practice by using English mathematical terms to make a more nuanced sociological point. "A nan za'a ce kaman eighty percent suna aron saurayi. Twenty percent kuma, irinku ne," he reported. 'Here one could say around eighty percent do the lending of boyfriends. And twenty percent are your [pl.] kind'.

Aliyu's use of the rhetoric of Western social science accomplished a number of things. In particular, it indexed his expert status with respect to Hausa homo society, a subject he knew I was interested in both personally and professionally. His remark can thus be seen as a helpful admonition to me, his American anthropologist friend, about the perils of making sweeping ethnographic generalizations. By contrast, his use of the term *irinku* 'your [pl.] kind' indexed his apparent acceptance of my description of what "we" Whites/Westerners do. His assertion that a sizable minority of Hausa homos were "our kind" also suggested that, at least with respect to the lending of boyfriends, Hausa homo society was in the midst of a cultural change induced by contact with Whites. This echoes the narrative of sexual-cultural change invoked by Alhaji Zinari with respect to Arabs.

Although the referent of "we" was unspecified in this exchange (as it was at the end of my exchange with Alhaji Zinari), in the context of my frequent conversations with Aliyu it is reasonable to assume that both he and I understood the pronoun to refer, however implausibly, to North American homos generally, and possibly to the majority of gay men in the Western world. The final exchange, from a conversation that took place at my home in Kano, represents my attempt to give him some sense of the divisions that exist among North American gay men, and how these divisions are articulated through both sexual and linguistic practices. In this exchange I was teaching Aliyu, who had studied some English in secondary school, a few terms from the gay lexicon that my friends and I sometimes use in the United States. I introduced the term *chocolate queen* to illustrate how some North American gay men categorize one another on the basis of a person's supposed erotic attraction to people of "other" ethno-racial groups.

"Wasu za su kira ni da sunan *chocolate queen* saboda yawancin samarina bak'ak'e ne," I explained. 'Some people would call me a *chocolate queen* because most of my boyfriends have been black[s]'. (As in the previous exchange, my use of the term *samari* 'boyfriends' implicitly indexed a "feminine" homo subjectivity similar to Aliyu's.)

In his reply, Aliyu surprised me by using the same lexical item to describe himself. "To ni ma, za'a iya kirana da *chocolate queen* saboda na fi harka da bak'ak'e." 'Then I too could be called a *chocolate queen* because I tend to do the deed with blacks [i.e., dark-skinned men]'.

As is evident in my translation of Aliyu's utterance, I ran into a semantic problem regarding the noun/adjective *bak'ak'e* 'black(s)' (singular *bak'i*), which I used to refer to Black men generally (i.e., men of African descent), whereas Aliyu understood it to refer specifically to dark-skinned African men. In a social context in which the vast majority of people are perceived to be of the same race, Aliyu's usage is, unsurprisingly, more typical and unmarked.⁶ In any event, I was challenged to explain why Aliyu's use of *chocolate queen* as a term of self-reference was pragmatically infelicitous. Most gay North American men would never think of a Black man as a "chocolate queen," just as the many White men who exclusively date other White men are not called "snow queens," a term that can be applied to African American men. I therefore realized, and had to explain, that the pragmatics of these labels specify not only the ascribed racial identity of the object(s) of a person's erotic desire, but that person's own racial subjectivity as well.

As noted by Reid-Pharr (1996) and others, the use of "race queen" labels in North American gay male circles has clearly grown out of, and continually reinforces, historical processes of inequality and exploitation that are structured along lines of gender, race, class and sexuality. Though unfamiliar with the foreign labels, my friend Aliyu—a poor citizen of an OPEC member state that was once a British colony, and resident of a large West African city with a sizable community of Arabs and other expatriates—was hardly unaware of these processes. A few years prior to the conversations excerpted here, for example, a good friend of his had met a wealthy White American gay man who had taken him to live in the United States, inspiring other Nigerian homos to fantasize openly about finding their own rich foreign "husbands." (I was sometimes mentioned as a possible candidate.) Even though Aliyu's own interactions with Whites, Arabs, and other non-Nigerians had been limited, he thus had some personal experience of the ways race, nation, gender, age, and sexuality are commodified in contemporary transnational contexts, homo as well as hetero. Consequently, it is possible to interpret his use of *chocolate queen* not as a misapprehension, but as an act of appropriation. From what I know about him, it is conceivable that Aliyu was acknowledging that his own sexual relationships were also structured by inequalities of age, wealth, and, if not race, perhaps color, however modest these might seem when compared to broader global asymmetries. From an interactional perspective we might also read his comment as a cooperative conversational move, whereby he sought to construct a kind of friendly solidarity with me. In any case, the affection the two of us

shared as friends would not obviate the political-economic disparities we inevitably have to contend with.

Conclusion

In our talk about sex, my Hausa friends and I occasionally found ourselves comparing one another's customs, desires and dislikes, and we often attributed our perceived erotic differences to our (and others') respective membership in distinct ethno-racial categories. Although our discourse often suggested that we considered such membership to be an *a priori* fact ("he does X because he belongs to such-and-such group"), it was in the course of making those attributions that the identity categories were indexed and reconstructed. I use the word *reconstructed* to emphasize the intertextual and emergent nature of this process; that is, the continual interplay between fleeting discursive interactions and enduring cultural discourses (Briggs and Bauman 1992). It is important to recognize, therefore, that each of our identity attributions was negotiated in response to both an immediate conversational context and, simultaneously, to broader historical contexts of intercultural contact.

By describing the sexual overtures Arab men had made toward him, Alhaji Zinari constructed himself as worldly, experienced and attractive. At the same time, by characterizing those overtures as excessive and "filthy," he invoked a popular Hausa tradition of ironically challenging the conceit that contemporary Arabs, as the ethnic descendants of the original recipients of the Holy Qur'an, are inherently "truer," more pious Muslims. This challenge was reinforced by his rhetorical linking of modern Arabs to the decadence and technological innovations of the White, Western world. My own comments unwittingly supported this rhetorical move, and served to construct me as a brazen representative of that world. Though he never said so explicitly, Alhaji Zinari's constructions of "other" homosexualities implicitly constructed his own Hausa homo practices as a moral norm—hardly permissible from an Islamic point of view, certainly, but less strange and decadent than those of his Arab and White counterparts.

Alhaji Hamza, whom I met in a bar (a canonically un-Islamic location), invoked a somewhat different understanding of Hausaness and Whiteness. His surprised reaction to the news that I was a homo recalls the imperialist canard of White men's moral supremacy. It is possible, of course, that Alhaji Hamza's surprise was feigned or exaggerated—that he did not really doubt the existence of White homos. In that case, his outburst could be read as mocking imperialist ideology rather than endorsing it. Whether genuine or ironic, however, Alhaji Hamza's utterance and his initial hesitance to discuss homo matters in my presence responded to and reinforced the patriarchal, heterosexual norms that are hegemonic in northern Nigeria, as in most Western societies. In such settings, admitting one's homosexuality can be just as damaging to one's moral and political stature as the exposure of the sexual act itself.

In the first two exchanges speakers focused explicitly on the categories of Whiteness and Arabness, whereas Hausaness and Africanness remained

discursively unmarked. In the final exchanges, however, Aliyu Raufu and I reflexively considered the ethno-racial implications of our individual desires and practices in terms of both local and foreign identities. Thus, in his response to my rejection of the lending of boyfriends as a practice "we" don't do, Aliyu displayed an acute metapragmatic awareness of the implications of this shifter (Silverstein 1976) and made a point of explaining how Hausa homo society was more complex than I had implied. A similar sensibility was revealed in his appropriation of the gay American English term *chocolate queen* to describe his own sexual practices. Both moves highlight the historical and interactional contingency not only of pronominal and lexical shifters, but of Blackness, Whiteness, Hausanness, and other racial and sexual categories. Like the earlier exchanges, they reproduced and responded to the power asymmetries associated with Euro-Western colonialism, the geographical expansion of Arab-Islamic culture, and related historical processes, in which sexuality has played and continues to play a central role.

For readers who understand sexual identity and desire primarily as intrapsychic phenomena, my analysis of the discursive construction of racialized sexualities might seem to suggest that such constructions are nothing more than historically conditioned misapprehensions of essentially individual proclivities, i.e., stereotypes. To the contrary, I would emphasize that it is not just talk about sex, but sexuality as a complex configuration of psychological, corporeal and discursive phenomena—desires, fantasies, acts and interpretations—that both informs and is structured by political, economic and cultural asymmetries. It is these processes that have made Whiteness (and race) such a powerful object of fascination and revulsion for so many of us, whether we are impoverished Nigerian homos or well-fed scholars of language and culture—whether we talk about it openly or not.

Notes

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1. All Hausa words are written according to standard (Nigerian) orthography, with one minor caveat: for reasons of technological simplicity, and following the practice of many Hausa writers and publishers, I represent the glottalized consonants *b'*, *'d*, *k'*, and *'y* as shown instead of with their standard "hooks."

2. All personal names used in this essay, other than my own, are pseudonyms.

3. The masculine title *Alhaji* (fem. *Hajiya*) literally denotes a person who has performed the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, though in colloquial Hausa it generally refers to any Muslim of exalted social rank. In this article I use the title to refer to individuals who were addressed and referred to as such during my fieldwork.

4. Although Hausa does not distinguish gender for plural nouns, I translate *Turawa* (i.e., people of *Turai* 'Europe') as 'White men' because the masculine referent is unmarked not only in this exchange but in Hausa men's talk generally. The term *Turawa*, though etymologically geographical, is most often used in a way that conflates

race and place of origin to refer to all people of European descent, hence my translation of it as 'Whites'. Alternatively, *Turawa* is sometimes used to refer to people of any ethnic or racial background who were born and raised in Euro-Western countries.

5. Although Alhaji Zinari's reference to oral sex as "your [-pl.] work" (*aikinku*) could imply that "we"—White homos—perform oral sex for money, my interpretation is based on the fact that *aiki* 'work' can also be translated as 'function' or 'activity'.

6. Although Hausa did not have lexical items denoting a racial distinction between "Black" and "White" peoples before the advent of European colonialism, this opposition is usually represented in contemporary Hausa by the terms *bak'ar fata* 'black skin' (Black person) and *farar fata* 'white skin' (White person). By themselves, the terms *bak'i* 'black [m.]' and *fari* 'white [m.]' are also used to describe people with dark and light complexions, regardless of race or ethnicity.

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Social Sciences Division

State University of New York/Purchase College

735 Anderson Hill Road

Purchase, NY 10577

Rudolf.Gaudio@purchase.edu